





John Hay

THE LIFE  
AND LETTERS OF  
JOHN HAY

BY

WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER

VOLUME II



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# THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF JOHN HAY

## CHAPTER XVII “THE BREAD-WINNERS”

WHILE Mr. Stone spent the summer of 1877 in Europe, Hay took charge of the financier's business affairs. That was the season when the employees of several of the great railroads organized strikes, which quickly turned into riots and created for a short time the most alarming condition of its kind which the country had known. The worst excesses were committed at Pittsburg, but other large cities, particularly the railway centres, passed through the ordeal. Among them was Cleveland.

With what emotions John Hay watched the explosion appears in his letters to his father-in-law.

*To Amasa Stone*

ROOM 1, CUSHING'S BLOCK,  
CLEVELAND, O., July 24, 1877.

... Since last week the country has been at the mercy of the mob, and on the whole the mob has behaved rather better than the country. The shame-

ful truth is now clear, that the government is utterly helpless and powerless in the face of an unarmed rebellion of foreign workingmen, mostly Irish. There is nowhere any firm nucleus of authority — nothing to fall back on as a last resort. The Army has been destroyed by the dirty politicians, and the State militia is utterly inefficient. Any hour the mob chooses, it can destroy any city in the country — that is the simple truth. Fortunately, so far, it has not cared to destroy any but railway property.

I saw Mr. Porter this morning. He says there are some 2000 men at Collinwood with revolvers. The freight men here will not let the merchants have their goods, which are spoiling at the Depot. Mr. Newell has no authority to act, and Mr. Vanderbilt has as yet given no orders.

All day yesterday a regular panic prevailed in the city. But the Rolling Mill resuming work helped matters somewhat, and to-day the scare has subsided. I was advised to send my wife and children out of town to some place of safety, but concluded we would risk it. The town is full of thieves and tramps waiting and hoping for a riot, but not daring to begin it themselves. If there were any attempt to enforce the law, I believe the town would be in ashes in six hours. The mob is as yet good-natured.

A few shots fired by our militia company would ensure their own destruction and that of the city. A miserable state of things—which I hope will be ancient history before you read this letter. Of course, if things get worse, I shall send Clara and the babies away out of danger with George Dudgeon, and keep house myself.

*July 25.* Things look more quiet to-day. Passenger and mail trains will begin running as soon as possible, Mr. Couch says, and it is probable that the strike may end by the surrender of the railroad companies to the demands of the strikers. This is disgraceful, but it is hard to say what else could be done. There is a mob in every city ready to join with the strikers, and get their pay in robbery, and there is no means of enforcing the law in case of a sudden attack on private property. We are not Mexicans yet—but that is about the only advantage we have over Mexico.

July 27, 1877.

We have passed through a week of great anxiety, which has brought us, as it now appears, nearly to the end of the gravest danger. It is not worth while to recount details to you, and there are some things which I prefer not to put on paper. But I feel that a profound misfortune and disgrace has fallen on the

country, which no amount of energy or severity can now wholly remedy.

One astonishing feature of the whole affair is that there has been very little fall in stocks. In the agony of the riots Rock Island went down a little, but recovered yesterday, before it really looked safe to buy, while a mob was still rampant in Chicago. Until the troops arrived, there was no safety in buying, for the rioters might destroy millions of property in an hour. . . .

The Democrats have nominated Bishop [of] Cincinnati for Governor. I do not know or care anything for him, but I am very glad that Converse was defeated. . . .

I cannot feel at all sure yet as to the result of these troubles on the election. The Democrats will of course try to throw all the blame on the administration, but it is possible that the law-and-order men may rally to the party which is unquestionably the law-and-order party. The Democrats have tried to curry favor with the rioters in their platform, without however daring to approve the outrages - and the Republicans will also have a milk-and-water resolution in favor of law and order, without daring to condemn the strike. These are the creatures which manage our politics.

August 17, 1877.

I am profoundly disgusted with our candidate West. He has made a speech, modifying a little his idiotic talk here, but it is still bad enough. All his sympathies are with the laboring man, and none with the man whose enterprise and capital give him a living. He condemns the use of force against strikes and opposes the increase of the army. He is a little mixed on finance, but is better than the common run in that respect. I suppose I shall have to vote for him, but it is a pill.<sup>1</sup>

August 23, 1877.

... Do you read the American news? If so, you must be sickened at the folly and cowardice of public men on both sides. Everything to flatter the mob. The one splendid exception is John Sherman's speech at Mansfield. I don't agree with everything he said, but it was a speech of ability, honesty and courage. . . .

The prospects of labor and capital both seem gloomy enough. The very devil seems to have entered into the lower classes of working men, and there are plenty of scoundrels to encourage them to all lengths.

<sup>1</sup> Richard M. Bishop, the Democratic candidate, was elected.

September 3, 1877.

... I am thankful you did not *see* and *hear* what took place during the strikes. You were saved a very painful experience of human folly and weakness, as well as crime. I do not refer to the anxiety, etc., for you are not a man who would be overanxious even in a general panic; but you would have been very much disgusted and angered, I am sure. . . .

Those riots of 1877 burnt deep into Colonel Hay's heart. Like the rest of the world, he had theorized on the likelihood of war between Capital and Labor but he had reassured himself by the comfortable assumption that under American conditions — equal opportunity for all, high wages, equal laws, and the ballot-box — no angry laboring class could grow up. The riots blew such vaporings away: for they proved that the angry class already existed, that the ballot box instead of weakening strengthened it, and that not only the politicians of both parties but also the constituted authorities would avoid, as long as possible, grappling with it.

The event was too large to be dismissed as an outburst of temper: it must be accepted as a symptom a portent. Did it mean that a cancer had attacked the body politic and would spread to the vital organs

Was Democracy a failure, — Democracy — for more than a century the dream of the down-trodden, the ideal of those who loved mankind and believed in its perfectibility, the Utopia which good men predicted should somehow turn out to be a reality? Hay had sung his pæan to liberty; Hay had throbbed at the efforts of patriots in Spain and in France to overthrow their despots; he had even exulted over the signs of democratization in England. Had he been the victim of mirage? Was Democracy not the final goal of human society, but only a half-way stage between the despotism of Autocracy and the despotism of Socialism?

These questions he could not evade; no more can you who read or I who write. The solution was not for his day; nor is it likely to come in ours. But he held, as did many of his contemporaries, that the assaults on Property were inspired by demagogues who used as their tools the loafers, the criminals, the vicious, — Society's dregs who have been ready at all times to rise against laws and government. That you have property is proof of industry and foresight on your part or your father's; that you have nothing, is a judgment on your laziness and vices, or on your improvidence. The world is a moral world; which it would not be if virtue and vice received the same rewards.

This summary, though confessedly crude, may help, if it be not pressed too close, to define John Hay's position. The property you own — be it a tiny cottage or a palace — means so much more than the tangible object! With it are bound up whatever in historic times has stood for civilization. So an attack on Property becomes an attack on Civilization.

After revolving these things for several years, Hay decided to embody them in a novel, which should serve as a warning to those sentimentalists who were coquetting with revolutionary theories, and to those responsible officials who, through cowardice or self seeking, were tolerant of revolutionary practices. He wrote his novel, apparently in the winter of 1882-83, called it "The Bread-Winners," and sent it to Mr. Howells, who, although no longer the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, was in close relations with his successor, Thomas Bailey Aldrich. Mr. Howell read the manuscript with enthusiasm, and urged Aldrich to accept it. This Aldrich, after a slight inspection, was eager to do, provided the author would let his name be published. But Hay clung to anonymity, and gave the book to Mr. Gilder of the *Century Magazine*.

It ran through six installments, — the first appearing in the *Century* for August, 1883, — caught the public at once and became the novel of the year.

Although the secret of its authorship must have been shared by eight or nine persons, it was never so authoritatively divulged that curiosity ceased. Any one familiar with Cleveland could not fail to recognize that city as the scene of the story; further reasoning might have reduced the number of Clevelandites capable of writing it to one — John Hay; but he, of course, denied, or gave an evasive answer, when the accusation was made to him point-blank. Perhaps he remembered Seward's excellent formula, jotted down in the White House Diary: "If I did n't know, I would gladly tell you." So to the end of his life Hay never acknowledged "The Bread-Winners."

The success of "The Bread-Winners" during its serial publication outran that of any previous American novel. Three things contributed to this — the cleverness of the book, the timeliness of the subject, and the mystery as to authorship. Readers and critics alike set themselves to guessing. The literary journals devoted columns to correspondents, some of whom proved that the author must be a man, while others insisted that only a woman could understand the heart of Woman as the unknown writer had done. The name of pretty nearly every literary worker was suggested.

One lady in Madison, Wisconsin, wrote that, having "barely escaped a siege of brain fever in endea-

voring to pin it on to the *guilty one* by an analytical process," she would "save others from the calamity which threatened" her, by suggesting that the culprit "may be, and perhaps is, the Rev. Washington Gladden." A Western Doctor of Divinity insisted that, although he was the author, the publishers had never paid him. A high-school pupil of Worcester, Massachusetts, celebrated her sixteenth birthday by writing to express surprise that the heroine's name — Alice Belding — was hers also, and she begged the author to give pleasure to her and many friends — "among whom are my teachers" — by telling her whether he had known her father — "a business man of an extensive acquaintance."

From Kansas came the criticism of a local blue-stocking, who felt it her duty to point out to "Dear Madam" lapses in taste or rhetoric, and concluded: "I am a little acid, perhaps, because you are successful, while, so far, I am not. So be it, but I will say that my whole expectation will be more than gratified if I ever write anything that receives half the favors yours has done." As was to be expected, a New York lady in East 27th Street made a truly metropolitan proposal, without evasion. "Mr. Hay," she writes, "I understand that you repudiate the parentage of that clever and brilliant story 'The Bread-Winners.' As it is now a foundling thrown upon the

world without father or mother, would you object to my adopting it as my own child and giving it my name? If you are willing to resign all rights and title to it, I shall be most proud to give it a permanent home and standing."

But anonymity has its annoyance as well as its humor. A literary item went the rounds of the papers purporting to give an interview with Mr. Roswell Smith, the President of the Century Company, who was thus quoted: "By the way, that story was rejected by the *Atlantic* before it was brought to us. Then we rejected it — probably for the same reason. But in returning it, our editors gave the author the result of their critical judgment as to desired modifications, and he was given to understand that we would take it if he should see fit to conform. He did so. Without those changes we should have been compelled to reject it — any firm would."

These false statements nettled Hay, but he made no public denial. In a private note to Mr. Smith, he poured his grievance into friendly ears.

"I have seen this . . . in several papers. It comes, of course, not from you, but from Aldrich. You know, perhaps, that Howells read the book and tried to get it for the *Atlantic*. Aldrich offered a higher price for it than the *Century* paid — but wanted my name with it. He only saw two chapters

of it. After it began to be printed his restless vanity induced him to say he had refused it — and when people told him he had made a mistake, he [pretended] that it had been essentially changed since he read it. The fact is there were never any changes, of any consequence, made in it. It was printed exactly as *first* written — with the exception of *5 or 6 lines — which were added*. Not a single page was struck out, though two or three phrases were omitted at Mr. Gilder's request, in the magazine and restored in the book. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Smith at once exonerated Mr. Aldrich and shifted the blame to himself, saying that he had given a reporter named Croffut an interview, in which, when printed, colorless suggestions of his appeared as downright statements.

The satisfactions of success, however, far outweighed these vexations. The book had not been long in print before Mr. Gilder wrote that the *Century* would welcome another novel or a sheaf of short stories. “It is curious to see,” he wrote, “how many people are offering us ‘anonymous’ novels. What more likely than that the *Century* should come out with a new anonymous ‘novel’ or ‘story?’ If it were not said to be ‘by’ the author of the B.W.,

<sup>1</sup> As Roswell's Smith's letter is dated November 5, 1884, Hay's was probably written a day or two earlier.

people would be off the scent, for no one would suppose we would miss such a good 'announcement.' Or a *nom de guerre* might be taken — perhaps a feminine one." (March 10, 1884.)

Hay probably smiled at the suggestion that he should disguise himself in a woman's petticoat; but henceforth he permitted himself no further literary digressions until the Lincoln History should be completed. The English read "The Bread-Winners" with enthusiasm, and their critics gave it unusual praise.<sup>1</sup> It was brought out in French, serially and in book form, under the title "Le Bien d'Autrui." Tauchnitz lost no time in reprinting it; there were translations into German and other foreign languages, besides various replies to it, one of which, "The Money-Makers,"<sup>2</sup> achieved notoriety.

<sup>1</sup> The *Saturday Review* of February 2, 1884, sums up its long favorable notice in these terms: "The book is not without faults, frequent and evident enough. The basement is too big for the roof for one thing; the promise of the earlier chapters is not quite fulfilled; there are rankness and crudity; there are many signs of inexperience as a novelist; for, although the anonymous author is beyond question a writer of experience, he is obviously enough a novice as a novelist. But, after making all deductions, there remains a substantial balance in his favour. *The Bread-Winners* is emphatically a book to be read. It is a very strong story, but its brutal force has no flavour of the muscular paganism of Ouida and her fellows; it is rather the reaction of a highly-cultivated gentleman familiar with camps and courts, and tired of the prettinesses and pettinesses of most modern fiction." Professor Brander Matthews tells me that he wrote the review, which accounts for the hints that the reviewer suspected who the author was.

<sup>2</sup> By Henry F. Keenan.

Read today, "The Bread-Winners" still holds its rank among remarkable novels. The skill with which typical persons in various social classes are brought upon the scene and the consistency with which each moves forward to his catastrophe, are as evident as is the author's success in causing the several plots to converge on the central situation. The men and women are clearly individualized; much of the conversation flashes; and the atmosphere is fittingly sultry and oppressive, as before an electrical storm. But more important than the love story which runs through it, is the sociological drama. You become almost too absorbed in the issue of the struggle between Labor and Capital to care whether Farnham and Alice marry or not.

That indicates Hay's skill as an advocate. Convinced himself, he argues convincingly that the right lies nearly all on one side. He does not deny that Capital has its faults; he paints individual Capitalists in dark colors: but he instills into you the belief that "honest" Labor has nothing to complain of; that socialistic and anarchistic panaceas, instead of curing, would poison Society; and that those persons who engineer a social war are either actual or potential criminals, having the gullible masses for their dupes. The moral is obvious—Society must protect itself against the faction which plots its destruction.

Remembering the date when "The Bread-Winners" was written, we must regard it as the first important polemic in American fiction in defense of Property. But to-day, even conservatives have moved beyond Hay's outposts. If the book does not belong in the little group of other social polemics, like Mrs. Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables," it is because Mrs. Stowe and Hugo spoke to free the downtrodden from misery and injustice, whereas Hay pleads in behalf of preserving the rights of the fortunate in the battle of life. His motive is as honorable as theirs — for he aims at saving civilization by saving the law-and-order classes on which civilization rests — but it lacks the emotional appeal.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### “ABRAHAM LINCOLN: A HISTORY”

VERY soon after they reached the White House in 1861, Nicolay and Hay began to collect memorabilia for a possible history of Lincoln's administration. They perceived its epochal significance; they divined his singular greatness. Nicolay was the more systematic gatherer, but Hay's Journals, which he kept only too casually, stored up much good grist. After Lincoln's death, the secretaries felt that, sooner or later, they ought to tell to posterity their story of their martyred chief; fortunately, they could not find a responsive publisher, when Hay, on his return from Paris, made inquiries in New York. That would have been premature, because many essential documents were then out of reach.

The largest body of material, indispensable in every respect, belonged to the President's son, Mr. Robert T. Lincoln; and in due time he put it at their disposal, with the proviso that, before publishing, they should submit their work to him. The earliest record that has come to hand is a letter dated March 3, 1874, in which Nicolay reports to Mr. Lincoln

that he is examining the Lincoln manuscripts. The following year, Hay having resigned from the *Tribune* and settled in Cleveland, the collaborators began in earnest.

"My dear Hay," Nicolay writes on November 16, 1875, "I send you to-day by express the first instalment of material."

Being Marshal of the United States Supreme Court from 1872 to 1887, Nicolay resided in Washington, where he was near the official archives. His library was the central storehouse of material; but Hay collected also, and, as the work went on, he bought many manuscripts and documents and rare books for their joint use. Nicolay blocked out the schedule of chapters, which they then discussed together, and, after coming to a decision, each chose the topics he preferred. As fast as these were written, they passed to the other partner, for criticism, trimming, verification, and additions.

After a while, when publishers learned that this work was in progress, they made offers for the copyright; but Nicolay and Hay declined them all until they saw the end in sight. Finally, in November, 1885, they signed a contract with the Century Company, selling to it the serial rights in the history. The price agreed upon — fifty thousand dollars — was the largest any American magazine had paid.

Their first installment appeared in the *Century* for November, 1886; their last, in May, 1890.

On this frame of bare facts, let us now weave extracts from Hay's letters, which will disclose their methods of composition, the apportionment of subjects and, very often, the serious handicap of ill-health against which both of them, but more especially Hay, labored.

*To J. G. Nicolay*

514 EUCLID AVENUE,  
CLEVELAND, O., Dec. 4 [1875?].

I am established here comfortably in winter quarters. I have received your box, and as soon as a little preliminary business is over and Mr. Stone has started for San Francisco or thereabouts, I shall go seriously to work upon it. I hope to be able to make considerable progress by next spring. . . .

Have I told you that Colfax sent me a copy of his letter to Arnold giving his last interview?

I read Count de Paris' last chapter yesterday and got a big disgust. It is a sincere and stupid attack on Lincoln in McClellan's interest. I had an angry talk of ten minutes with Lord Houghton about it in New York. He began it and I had to intimate to His Lordship that he was talking too much . . . on insufficient information.

CLEVELAND, O., June 23, 1876.

I have been dreading and postponing for some time the writing of this letter. I hate to tell bad news — and my news is bad. I went industriously to work last winter. Got a fine start on my material and commenced putting it in shape. I had even written a few pages when I was struck with partial blindness. I have had numerous doctors at me almost ever since, but the trouble is not yet over. During the last month my general health has been completely restored, and I think I see the case more clearly than before and hope by taking it easy this summer to be well next fall. That is the whole story, and I have never had the heart to write it before. I write now because I am greatly encouraged and begin to think I shall soon be all right again.

CLEVELAND, O., August 9, 1877.

I have hardly dared to write to you for some little time for fear of making illusory promises; but I think I can say now that I am started and can keep at work. If nothing happens adversely, we can have Lincoln inaugurated by the 4th of March, 1878. I have been very hard at work for a month or so, and sat down some weeks ago to writing. I have written

from nine to ten thousand words (that is the only definite way of stating it) and have brought up to 1830. I do not anticipate any bad delays unless my health should give way again. My old foe, the headache, is lying in wait for me, but I hope to get free. I write with great labor and difficulty — my imagination is all gone — a good riddance. I shall never write easily and fluently again. . . .

*To Robert T. Lincoln*

506 EUCLID AVENUE,  
CLEVELAND, O., February 14, 1878.

MY DEAR ROBERT: —

I have been spending a fortnight in Washington with Nicolay and am very much gratified at the work he has done in arranging your papers and in preparing for our history. Besides putting the MS. in admirable order, he has made a first-rate beginning at the chapters allotted to him. I also have had pretty good luck during the last season and we now consider the big job well begun. It will take a long time yet, but we are in no hurry and I presume you are not. We have made such arrangements that in case either of Nicolay's death or mine your property is safe and the work as far as done is available for the survivor.

On the way home I heard of the death of our old

friend Mr. Welles.<sup>1</sup> It is of great importance to us that we should get access to his diary and other papers. I know how much Edgar thinks of you, and he probably knows the interest which his father took in our work. As soon as you think proper I would like to have you suggest to Edgar that he should put the diary in our hands; we should, of course, pledge ourselves to regard it confidentially until our history is published, and even then to be guided by his wishes in regard to what should be used. I wish I could see you here sometime. Could you not run down for a few days. We could show you and Mrs. Lincoln a pretty town and plenty of sleigh-riding, although in other amusements we are rather deficient.

Yours faithfully.

I saw the President in Washington. The only thing of any importance he talked about was you. You evidently made a great impression on His Excellency.

*To J. G. Nicolay*

CLEVELAND, O., February 27, 1878.

I have devoted a day or two to looking over my notebooks, and am prepared to sit down on you with some force. I have a large amount of valuable

<sup>1</sup> Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy. Edgar, his son, died in 1915.

notes — made on the spot, the extent of and value of which I had quite forgotten. They are weak in 1861, not very good in '62 except in respect to Second Bull Run; but quite full and valuable for '63 and '64. They are not in good shape. I do not know but that I may try to have them copied by typewriter. . . .

Do you understand Mr. Welles's reference to a "Memorandum," written by Lincoln in 1864 in anticipation of defeat, in [the] *Atlantic*?<sup>1</sup> I have the original Memorandum; he gave it to me, in the presence of the Cabinet, after his reëlection. I have the whole occurrence in my notebook. As I was leaving the room with it, Judge Bates asked me for a copy. I cussed silently — then Welles asked for one, and then everybody. Charlie Penfield made the copies, and I have been dreading their reappearance, and felt a little relieved that our old friend had finished his work without an allusion to this matter — when, lo! in the very last article he refers to it. If he has not left other articles in MS. we are still safe; but if he has, he will be sure to copy this precious document in full in the next one. . . .

<sup>1</sup> The article by Gideon Welles to which Hay refers appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* for March, 1878, and was entitled "The Opposition to Lincoln in 1864." Lincoln's "self-denying pledge" is given above, vol. 1, pp. 216-17.

CLEVELAND, O., Jan. 20, 1879.

I have had good luck for a week or so, and have made considerable progress. I have almost got to the Shields duel time. Have you any original matter not included in the Lamon book? . . . I wish I could see you for a week in regard to two or three matters — but I dread journeys more than I can tell you. I get along well enough from day to day, but a change upsets me and gives me colds and insomnia.

Where does your work begin — that is where is my work to join yours, *quoad* Lincoln? How far am I to write his biography before reaching your history of the g-r-r-eat conflict? Write as soon as you get this. Send me all the Shields' stuff you have, and any suggestions you want to make about Lincoln's marriage, the use of the Speed letters, etc. . . . If I keep my health, I expect to work steadily on this business henceforward.

Interruptions besides those due to ill-health kept retarding his progress: chief of these being his service under Mr. Evarts in the State Department.

CLEVELAND, O., March 30, 1879.

I saw to-day in the *Graphic* (?) a paragraph by T. on the authority of Frank Mason of Cleveland, that I alone had finished the first volume of our History.

I can't think Mason could have made such a mistake. T. must have misunderstood him. Both the papers here have tried to interview me on the work. I requested them to say nothing, as we were not ready for any announcement; and they complied with my request. But it is useless to try to stop up all the possible leaks, and some of these times we will have to let something be said, — in the *Tribune*, I should say, — so that the truth may be known. Think of it a little, and when I see you, give me your views. When am I to see you? It looks now as if I could not get to Washington this spring. My poor mother has had a dreadful accident, breaking her thigh bone at the hip. I have been in Warsaw for three weeks, hardly expecting her to live from one day to another — but last week she began to rally and now we have strong hopes of her recovery.

... I was getting along splendidly when this disaster happened. It throws me out, and I shall require some time to get in running order again. I have written now, in all, over 50,000 words. . . .

*To R. T. Lincoln*

CLEVELAND, O., January 27, 1885.

DEAR BOB: —

Nicolay tells me he has laid before you or is about to do so, the first volumes of our history, containing

the chapters in which I have described the first forty years of your father's life.

I need not tell you that every line has been written in a spirit of reverence and regard. Still you may find here and there words or sentences which do not suit you. I write now to request that you will read with a pencil in your hand and strike out everything to which you object. I will adopt your view in all cases, whether I agree with it or not, but I cannot help hoping you will find nothing objectionable. I do not think I have told you we have a new boy-baby,<sup>1</sup> born Christmas time. . . .

Faithfully yours.

By 1885 the collaborators had so far mastered their material, that they were already thinking of publication. Hay's correspondence of this year lets us see the work in the very process of becoming.

*To J. G. Nicolay*

CLEVELAND, O., April 13, 1885.

I have got to the 8th of March, 1862. What provision, in the schedule, has been made for the fight of the *Merrimack* and *Monitor*? Shall I do that? If so, all the material necessary is in the *Century* articles,<sup>2</sup> I suppose.

<sup>1</sup> Clarence Leonard Hay.

<sup>2</sup> The *Century Magazine* had been publishing a valuable series of articles on the Civil War.

I am kept riled constantly by the lies of McClellan, Joinville, and Paris. They have built up an impudent fiction which I fear the plain truth will never destroy. And the *Century* is going to give McC. the vast influence of its million readers.

CLEVELAND, O., April 22, 1885.

I have been going over your schedule with some care in connection with the work I am doing and I can't help seeing a radical difference of view between us as to the extent of treatment to be given to each topic. For instance: You indicate as separate chapters, The President's War Council. — Stanton — President's War Order. — President's Plan. — McClellan's Fiasco.

I have put all these into one chapter! to be called say, "Plans of Campaign."

Again you have "Manassas Evacuated" and "To the Peninsula." I shall make one short chapter of both. My idea of the McC. business was something like this: —

1. Army of Potomac. McC. Commander in Chief.
2. Plans of Campaign.
3. Evacuation of Manassas. Off for Peninsula.
4. Yorktown.
5. Chickahominy and Jackson's Raid.
6. The Change of Base.

7. Harrison's Landing.
8. Pope and Porter.
9. Antietam.
10. After Antietam — Burnside.

You make 15 chapters of the above.

Now there is certainly matter enough to make 15 or 50 chapters of it — but I judge from my own weariness of the subject that no living man will read more than I am writing. We will be happy if they read as much.

I saw young Harper in New York. They *want* the book, say they *count* on it. I put them off for the present.

CLEVELAND, Jan. 17. [No year.]

Your package of doc's is received and I regard it with dread and terror — like a magician contemplating a demon that he has raised and cannot lay. I will try to tackle it next week. I don't know where or how to begin — but will sail in anyhow and we will "put a head on it" when we come together. It looks to me awfully full for one chapter — but it must be squeezed in. If we give every incident a chapter we will have a hundred volumes.

The two preceding letters lead us to infer that there was a recurring need of compromise between Nicolay's desire for thoroughness and Hay's artistic

craving for proportion. The next note broaches the *Century* project.

CLEVELAND, O., June 16, 1885.

... The offer of the *Century* is certainly very tempting. Of course we could cut down a good deal and present what would be a continuous narrative in about half the space we have taken for our book. It is not to be hastily refused — and yet, how would we feel if tied up to it?

CLEVELAND, O., July 6, 1885.

I have finished Jackson's raid and shall commence on Seven Days' Fight this week.

Good luck and good health at Bethel. I do not believe Gilder will want the stuff for his magazine. It is not adapted for that. There is too much truth in it.

I have now several chapters — call it half a volume to sound liberal — which you can flourish before him as a reserve.

If I can keep well, and I am not very much encouraged about it — I can write a volume in a year.

CLEVELAND, O., Aug. 20, 1885.

Gilder wrote to me some time ago saying he wanted to see us both. . . . I have to go to New York

again in the first half of October and we had better have our talk then. . . .

I have just finished Comte de Paris' 6th volume. It is all about Gettysburg and Mine Run. In spite of my prejudice against him — and his outrageous unfairness to Lincoln — it is a splendid piece of work. He cares no more for time than McClellan himself. He goes plodding peacefully along and tells everything. His chapters average 150 pages. He makes me ashamed of my feverish anxiety to boil down and condense — but when your job is to get the universe into 8 volumes, you must not make two bites of an atom.

I am "complaining," but I do not know that I am any worse when I work than when I idle. I feel woe is me! if I write not my stint daily.

The next note is penciled on the back of a letter from a Philadelphia publisher, who promises a large sale for the book, if they will give it to him.

July 18[?], 1885.

"Children cry for it." . . . I am working like a Turk. I have done my 7 Days' Battle and Garrison's Landing since I last wrote you. I am impelled by a fiend of hurry who yells in my ear, "Finish! finish! and get it off your stomach!" If I could keep my

present pace without breaking down we should be through easily in two years. I would like to show you what I am doing — that you may see whether it is as bad as it is rapid. But the rapidity is only in the writing. The study has taken years.

Now comes the most important letter of the series: in it Hay gives his creed as an historian.

CLEVELAND, O., Aug. 10, 1885.

I have just received your letters of the 7th and 8th. I herewith return the Gilder correspondence. There will be no difficulty whatever in beginning the series — if ever — next fall [1886]. The only contingency in which we should not be able to keep up would be death. If we live we can do it.

The reason why I wanted you to criticize the chapter with the greatest severity is this — I dictated every word of it. I found myself breaking down with the nervous fatigue of writing and copying. I therefore hired a stenographer. . . . I always thought I could not dictate — but I found the only thing was to take time and not hurry, to go back — erase, start fresh, etc., just as if I was writing — and not much faster. It is a great gain. . . . After he writes out the notes I go all over them again with great care.

As to your criticisms, you can put in all the things you think lacking, or make a note, and I will do it next fall, strike out or reduce to footnotes whatever you think superfluous. Do this without hesitation and I will do the same with you. An outside judgment on these points is almost sure to be right.

As to my tone towards Porter and McClellan — that is an important matter. I have toiled and labored through ten chapters over him [McC.]. I think I have left the impression of his mutinous imbecility, and I have done it in a perfectly courteous manner. Only in "Harrison's Landing" have I used a single injurious adjective. It is of the utmost moment that we should *seem* fair to him, while we are destroying him. The Porter<sup>1</sup> business is a part of this. Porter was the most magnificent soldier in the Army of the Potomac, ruined by his devotion to McClellan. We have this to consider. We are all alone in condemning him. I don't count John Logan as company for historians. Even Palfrey, who takes the hide off McClellan, speaks of "Porter's perfect vindication at the hands of the Board." A big majority of the American people believe him innocent: all the Democrats, all the Mugwumps, which means all the liter-

<sup>1</sup> General Fitz-John Porter, court-martialed after the Second Battle of Bull Run; subsequently exonerated.

ary folks, all the Southerners, and half the Republicans of the North. We believe him guilty; but don't think we need go further than say so dispassionately. A single word of invective, I think, would be injurious to us, rather than to him. It would be taken to show that we were still in the gall and bitterness of twenty years ago.

Gilder was evidently horrified at your saying that Lee ought to be shot: a simple truth of law and equity I find, after a careful reading of a dozen biographies and all his own reports, that Stonewall Jackson was a howling crank: but it would be the greatest folly for me to say so. I am afraid I have come too near saying so, in what I have written about him. He is a "saint and a hero," Gen'l Black said so in a speech the other day. General Black, of Illinois, Commissioner of Pensions.

The war has gone by. It is twenty years ago. Our book is to be read by people who cannot remember anything about it. We must not show ourselves to the public in the attitude of two old dotards fighting over again the politics of their youth.

I confess I learned something from the criticisms of your book. All the reviews acknowledged its merits of style, accuracy, and readability — but nearly every one objected to its tone of aggressive Northernism. This was a surprise to me. I read it in

MS. and thought it perfectly fair and candid — but I am of that age and imbued with all its prejudices.

We must not write a stump speech in eight vols., 8vo.

We will not fall in with the present tone of blubbering sentiment, of course. But we ought to write the history of those times like two everlasting angels who know everything, judge everything, tell the truth about everything, and don't care a twang of their harps about one side or the other.

There will be one exception. We are Lincoln men all through. But in other little matters, let us look at men as insects and not blame the black beetle because he is not a grasshopper.

Salmon P. Chase is going to be a nut to crack.

So is Stanton.

I am sick abed — but the Doctor thinks I am gaining on him, and will be out of his hands this week.

"Destroy this letter," Hay adds in a postscript. "It would be too great a temptation to any reporter who should pick it up." I am aware that I may be accused of indiscretion in printing criticisms so frank, written for Nicolay's eye alone. But a biographer's first duty — and his last — is to Truth; and if his subject cannot bear the light of truth, the biographer should not waste time over him. In this case, it is of

great importance that we should know in what spirit Nicolay and Hay wrote, because their history concerns Abraham Lincoln, and who can set a term, in centuries, to the longevity of Lincoln's fame?

That the two secretaries should carry into middle life the supreme enthusiasm of their youth, that their judgments should be tinged by past prejudices, that they should even feel it to be a duty to show up delinquents who had escaped exposure during the war, was inevitable. "We are Lincoln men all through" — that fact they never dissembled; and with that exception their aim was "to write the history of those times like two everlasting angels." How nearly they succeeded, the reader can determine by turning to their book. If he finds bias in it, this letter will inform him how far that bias was intentional, and how many times Hay, for one, in his endeavor to seem fair, curbed his impulse to speak out.

The endlessness of their task sometimes staggered them.

CLEVELAND, Dec. 17, [1885?]

I find *Murfreesboro* can be done concisely in less than a chapter. Are you doing Buell's "*Perryville*" Campaign? If not, I could sketch it in as an introduction to Murfreesboro and save that much space

We shall never get through in a million words, I fear; and so must seize every chance to condense.

MERCANTILE BANK BUILDING, ROOM 10.  
CLEVELAND, O., Aug. 29, 1885.

I received the schedule this morning and have been studying it all day. With what subjects you gobbled for yourself, the Vth volume is practically finished. There is Mexico and Diplomacy — but until I have read what you have done I do not know how to tackle those. I had thought of doing Mexico and Maximilian in one — beginning with a long retrospect — but I have not the material here. I cannot begin in the middle of the Western Campaign without reading your articles on the earlier incidents.

If *all* the Seward and Chase material is in Warden I could do that. There is enough in Chase's letters abusing Lincoln behind his back for a quiet scorcher — but think of Mrs. Hoyt,<sup>1</sup> if you please. There is some difficulty about the sea-coast subjects — you have begun them and I must first read thoroughly what you have done.

I might take Grant at Washington and do the Wilderness — though that is a great way ahead. I find a good many things to talk about — condensing of two or three into one.

<sup>1</sup> Chief Justice Chase's surviving daughter.

I have written Hooker and Meade. They make four chapters — Chancellorsville; The Invasion of Pennsylvania; Gettysburg (a long one); The Line of the Rapidan. I do not think Kilpatrick's Raid is worth a chapter. You could spin out a hundred pages of incidents, but they are all *aliunde*. I give him a ¶ in the Rapidan. The same with Stoneman's Raid.

You give the Gettysburg Oration a chapter. The Oration itself fills half-a-page. I thought of tacking it on to the end of the battle chapter.

For the Grant in the Wilderness we have a lot of material and I think might go on without Bob Scott. We have Badeau and Humphrey's elaborate work and Grant's report: then there is Swinton and the Rebellion Record.

Do you not make too much of — The Conscription Act; the Draft; The Riots; Lincoln-Seymour? I think there is a chance there for a judicious squeeze.

I wired you to send me the MS. I will, I think have another full copy made — to use for the book MS. in case extensive excisions are made by the Editor.

Dec. 14, 1885.

I have been toiling for a week on the Lincoln and the Churches chapter. I am brought to a stop for lack of Lincoln's own letters in the matter. If it is

perfectly convenient for you to get them out and send them to me, please do so.

As soon as the instalments of the History began to appear in the *Century*, the collaborators held frequent consultations, by letter or in person, with Mr. Gilder, the editor, or with Mr. Buel, the assistant editor. Generous though the *Century* was in allotting space, it could not undertake to print more than a third of the huge work. Hence, the need of selecting, condensing and trimming, over which the authors and the editors frequently disagreed, but not to the point of a serious break.

Three citations may interest readers who like to dissect an author's diction.

*To R. W. Gilder*

CLEVELAND, O., Oct. 22, 1886.

On galley 39 you will find a phrase, "mopped the floor with him." When I first heard it, years ago, it seemed very racy. Since then it has got to be a regular bit of newspaper slang. If it has grown banal to your ear, strike it out.

*To J. G. Nicolay*

CLEVELAND, O., May 26, (No year.)

You use continually a form of speech like this — "to immediately begin," "to promptly choose,"

etc. I think this is condemned by all the authorities. Lincoln used it, I know, but I don't think it wise for us to. I have marked a few instances, out of many in this number.

*To Henry Adams*

MANITOU, COLORADO, July 14, 1888.

... I take note of your criticisms. I have not the magazine in reach, and do not remember wherein I have sinned. I agree with you about the historical present, and would have sworn I never used it,—except possibly of writing. Do you bar that? May I not say, "Pliny observes," or "McClellan writes under the date of —"? I share your detestation of "now." In fact, I consider it horribly obscene—but I may sometimes have fallen into that crime.

Hay himself, like many Southerners and Westerners, including Lincoln and Lanier, confused "will" and "shall": but benevolent proof-readers kept these slips out of his printed books.

*To R. W. Gilder*

CLEVELAND, O., April 25, 1887.

The only question is whether you want the Life to run three years or four. If the former, you must take heroic measures. Leaving out a chapter here and there, or retrenching an adjective, will do no

good. You must cut great chunks of topics out. For instance, Nicolay says if you want to leave out the history of the opening of the Rebellion, there are twenty-six chapters between the election and the inauguration of Lincoln which can be left out, and only the intelligent reader, if such a being exists, will miss them. Then there are in all some dozen long chapters of the war in the West, absolutely essential in the history, which can be cut down to a paragraph in the Magazine. But it ought to be settled beforehand whether or not you intend to make these serious abridgments. Neither Nicolay nor I can write the work over again for the purpose of saving a half chapter, here and there. You have his full consent, and mine, to leave out as much as you like, but we cannot shorten up a chapter to any extent by rewriting.

This is in the nature of a caveat. If you hereafter tell us the infernal thing is too long, we will sweetly answer, "I told you so."

*To J. G. Nicolay*

MANITOU SPRINGS, COLO., July 22, 1888.

I received your letter of the 16th covering Gilder's of the 12th, with proofs, last evening. I gave the night to them and mailed them back to him this morning. I also wired him to cut as he liked. You

may do with him as you choose about *your* military chapters, but, for my part, I am perfectly willing to have him cut out every military chapter I have written. I am sick of the subject, and I fancy the public is. I will not, however, rewrite the book and send them down. Let him leave them all out and settle the matter with his readers.

159 WATER ST., Room 8  
CLEVELAND, O., Sept. 19, 18

I see the *Century* folks have whacked about the life out of the November instalment. I have graphed my approval — as they requested — because I think they have improved it, but because I approve every excision, large or small, that brings us nearer the end. My complaint is that they are printing too much. They will never get through this rate, in the time contemplated. I think I suggest that they leave out Vicksburg and Gettysburg and the Wilderness campaign *in toto*, on the ground that Lincoln did not personally direct those campaigns. As it is, they cut out about every third paragraph, destroying the significance of a chapter without gaining materially in space. The November instalment is, you see, only 18 pages.

I avoid calling there when I go to New York, as our interviews are invariably disagreeable.

I hope your summer has profited you more than mine has me. I have lost 10 pounds since June. I want to get done with this work.

Evidently, Hay was run down, and the foreordained conflict between author and editor irritated him. An author today who complained that a magazine editor was printing *only* eighteen pages of one article in a series of forty, would have to look far for sympathy. But when the rasping was over, it left no scars. He and Gilder remained fast friends through life.

*To J. G. Nicolay*

KNICKERBOCKER CLUB, N.Y.,  
April 15, 1889.

I told Gilder that he could cut and slash all he liked, provided we were to do nothing in the way of rewriting. He expressed his thanks for the permission, but thought he would not need to avail himself of it. They are all very cheery in the office about it.

I saw D. [Charles A. Dana?] this morning. He was quite curious about the process of collaboration, — said he had read it all thus far and could see no difference in manner or style. There is a singular proof of the nullity of criticism — coming as it does from one of the first critics of the age. I gave him no

satisfaction, but told him I thought no one would be able to say where one left off and the other began.

Whitman's lecture<sup>1</sup> yesterday was quite interesting as to audience and accessories. The lecture itself is about all in print, — nothing whatever new. The *Tribune* this morning, speaking of the lecture, calls Lincoln "this country's greatest President" — without qualification.

. . . Let me make one suggestion. In preparing for the chapters yet to be written, prepare — as far as possible — so that either of us can do the mere writing, when the time comes, without having to go all over the subject again. If I come back well next fall, I may be able, after finishing those I have allotted myself, to turn in and lend a hand to yours, if you find it then necessary to spare yourself. In that case it would be much easier to deal with a few envelopes than with a library.

That summer the Hays spent in England. Although Hay came back refreshed, he felt more and more the burden of the History, and the feverish desire, common to the nerve-harried, to be through with it, grew on him.

<sup>1</sup> Several times in his last years Walt Whitman gave his Lincoln lecture on the anniversary of the assassination.

*To Henry Adams*

LONDON, August 4, 1889.

... I am as anxious to get home and get through as ever I was to take my quinine when I was young, and have done. They send me an occasional column of abuse from some friend of McClellan or Chase and I can only wonder at the merciful Providence which keeps my critics away from the weak joints in my armor. Laws-a-mercy! If I had the criticising of that book, what a skinning I could give it! I can't amend it, but I could *éreinter* it — *de la belle manière*. There is nothing left but to read proof and get it printed, which will take six months, — forgotten, which may take six weeks.

From Cleveland, on his return, Hay writes to Mr. Adams: “The Lincoln peters out in January, and then there only remains the revision and proof-reading of the latter half of the impregnable volumes. You will get through first because you are *unus sed leo.*”<sup>1</sup>

The next letters, to Mr. Lincoln, explain themselves.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Adams was on the point of completing his American history.

*To R. T. Lincoln*

WASHINGTON, March 5, 1888.

Thank you for the corrections — all of which I have of course adopted. The MS. of all the articles goes to the publisher to-day. I was sorry to bother you, but I thought it best in every way to consult you — and it was.

I am much gratified at what you tell me about Mr. Lowell; he has after all said the best things about your father — but that's what a poet is for.<sup>1</sup>

We get thus far very little abuse and most of that is clearly motives.

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 12, 1888.

I own a few of your father's MS. which he gave me from time to time. As long as you and I live I take it for granted that you will not suspect me of boning them. But to guard against casualties hereafter, I have asked Nicolay to write you a line saying that I have never had in my possession or custody any of the papers which you entrusted to him.

I have handed over to Nicolay to be placed among your papers some of those which your father gave me. The rest, which are few in number, are very

<sup>1</sup> James Russell Lowell, in his "Commemoration Ode."

precious to me, I shall try to make an heirloom in my family as long as one of my blood exists with money enough to buy a breakfast.

We are nearly at the end of our life-long task and I hope you will think your father's fame has not suffered any wrong at our hands.

WASHINGTON, D.C., Dec. 22, 1889.

It has occurred to me that you might like to get to the end of the Magazine publication of our book, without waiting a month, so I send you this last instalment. They are putting the book into type as fast as we can revise and read the proof, but it is an enormous job, and will require several months to complete it. Think of reading, carefully and critically (stopping every five minutes to make sure of a fact or a situation), five thousand pages, four times over! This we have to do, *after* the book is finished.

The publishers think best to have the whole book ready before they begin to publish — they will then put out the volumes rather rapidly, two at a time. There will be ten volumes. It will be dedicated to you.

Now, in very fact, the fifteen-year-long task was drawing to a close.

*To W. D. Howells*

WASHINGTON, Jan. 22, 1890.

... And how are you? I have worked so like a dray-horse of late that I have seen nothing, heard nothing, read nothing; our proof-reading is half over. You know nothing about proof-reading, with you it is the perusal of a charming author, — no more; — with us it is reading an old story, musty and dry, and jumping up every instant to consult volumes still mustier, to see if we have volume and page right in the margin, — and the dull story right in the text. I am aweary of it. . . .

Jan. 23, 1890.

I have just read your study on Lincoln, and will not wait a moment even to see Nicolay, before thanking you. I should be less than human if I were not pleased with such generous praise from such an authority; but I am delighted more than I can tell you in view of the fact that you selected for approval precisely those features of the work in which, in our opinion, its success or failure is involved. I felt that we had not altogether wasted our time when I read what you say about our sacrifice to our task, about Lincoln's treatment of McClellan and his Cabinet . . . I like also what you say about

Lincoln’s use of words, and wish I had said it myself.

The work, big as it is, is really a *tour de force* of compression. In nine cases out of ten the people who criticize it blame us for having treated too briefly this, that, or the other subject, in which they are specially interested.

On March 18, 1890, Hay writes from Washington to Mr. Buel, in characteristic phrase, which seems to indicate a recovery of spirits at the approach of freedom: “We have been going on gaily for a week, and I hope we can keep it up. I shall charge my bill for quinine to you, if you keep me here till the malaria season. None but cats and congressmen can stand our August sunshine.”

*To R. W. Gilder*

WASHINGTON, June 19, 1890.

I have at last yielded to your furious importunity and have written an article on “Life at the White House in Lincoln’s Time.”<sup>1</sup> When will you want it? Nicolay thinks he will write one or two, but cannot promise them immediately.

I reserve the privilege of using the article as I please in future, and expect, of course, a monstrous

<sup>1</sup> Printed in the *Century* for November, 1890, vol. **XLI**, pp. 33-37.

honorarium for it — enough to put the Magazine into the hands of a receiver.

This final note to Nicolay shows the ingenuity on which an author must sometimes rely in order to meet the printer's exigence.

*To J. G. Nicolay*

KNICKERBOCKER CLUB,  
319 Fifth Ave., July 8 [1890].

They have just put the last page in my hands, twenty minutes before my train starts for Cleveland. There seem to be only two things to do: shorten p. 348 two words and lengthen the last page a line or two. P. 348 can be shortened by striking out "calmer nor" in the first line.

I can't on the spur of the moment invent a sentence or two to lengthen the last page. I will see what I can do when I get to Cleveland.

I could think of no way to put in the fact of your absence from the deathbed, after the note was suppressed, other than putting it into the text as you did — but it looks very awkward there — as if dragged in by the ears.

This hurry-scurry at the end is disgusting. I wish I could have stayed through — but I thought I had made allowance enough, in waiting till the 7th.

It is frightfully hot to-day and I am sick — been taking medicine all day to hold me together so as to get on the train.

Arrived at the station Hay telegraphed Nicolay: “To fix last page I can introduce on page 350 what Sherman says: General Grant, after having met the ruler of [almost] every civilized country on earth, said Lincoln impressed him as the greatest intellectual force with which he had ever come in contact.”

The insertion was made, and so the vast undertaking was completed.

The Century Company published the work in ten volumes that autumn, and sold 5000 sets by subscription within a short time. Since then some 1500 more sets have found a market. Not long before his death in 1901 Nicolay made a one-volume abridgment, which has reached a sale of about 35,000 copies. Remembering the world-wide publicity given to the installments of the History which appeared in the *Century*, it is evident that no other American historical work has reached so many readers in so short a time.

Subsequently the authors, at Mr. Gilder’s request, edited Lincoln’s letters and speeches, which were published in 1894.

The "Lincoln" calls for no critical comment. Nicolay and Hay very properly affixed to it the title, "A History," for only in the broadest sense is it a biography. Rather is it an historical quodlibet or encyclopedia, to be judged piecemeal, chapter by chapter, as the builder tests each block of material and not in its entirety, as a finished edifice. Anybody can point out where it errs in proportion, where it lacks charm; or where the narrative, instead of flowing forward like a river, seems to stagnate in a lag, or to lose itself in some subterranean channel, where it suffers from repetition; but such criticism would be beside the mark. The value of the "Lincoln" lies in its substance, which is priceless.

Some of its readers have thought they could discern Hay's chapters from Nicolay's, by the touchstone of style. The clues I have furnished may enlighten them. Certainly, Hay's characteristic style — which sparkles in "Castilian Days," in passages of "Bread-Winners," and in the best letters in the present volumes — rarely peeps through in the pages of the "Lincoln," where he and Nicolay seem to strive at being as unindividual as possible. When Hay was driven to dictation — the foe to durable writing — he further depersonalized his style. Nevertheless, the great work seldom falls below an excellent average, and, upon occasion, it rises to a high level.

will outlast all other histories of the period, and be kept alive as long as Abraham Lincoln's name survives. As the Lincoln Legend grows, men will turn again and again to the record of the two young secretaries who walked and talked with him, saw him most intimately as man, as statesman, and as savior of Democracy, and came to revere and love him as a hero-friend: for no other source can rival theirs.